Girls:
Challenging the world

A United Nations leaflet
for secondary-school students

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Foreword

Since its creation nearly 50 years ago, the United Nations has worked for the equality of women and men. We have worked to fulfil our goal, as originally stated in the United Nations Charter, to promote and encourage "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, agreed to by world leaders in 1990, represents one of our most recent efforts to set world-wide standards for freedom and human progress. Among other rights, it proclaims that of equality between girls and boys. Yet despite laws such as these, girls still suffer deprivation of one kind or another in every country.

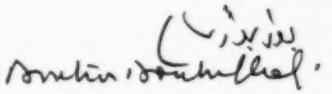
This educational booklet, **Girls: Challenging the world,** comes as the international community convenes for three special United Nations world conferences, during 1994 and 1995. Collectively, these meetings aim to help overcome the gaps between law and practice in promoting the rights of girls and women. The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Egypt, my own country, in September of this year, has shown very clearly how the number of children who are born, as well as the health and well-being of those children, are linked to the rights and

education of mothers — and therefore to the girls they once were.

The World Summit for Social Development, which took place in March 1995 at Copenhagen, Denmark, emphasized connections between the rights of girls and women and a better, richer life for all humankind. That kind of life, as you already know, depends on peace — not just the absence of war between nations, but the existence of homes and safe streets and schools in which girls and boys can practise building a better world.

Finally, the Fourth World Conference on Women will be held in China in September 1995. 1995 also marks the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations. I think this is a wonderful coincidence. It will help us realize that all boys and girls must share and shape the twenty-first century equally.

It will also help us recognize that our differences, whether of sex, race, language, culture or religion, need not divide us. On the contrary, if we do our best to understand and respect these differences, they will become a well of contributions from which we can draw to recreate our tired, war-torn planet as a garden of living, flowering ideals.



Boutros Boutros-Ghali

United Nations Secretary-General

Letter to students

from the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information

Dear Students,

The world over, whether in a village in tropical Africa or a North American suburb, girls and boys tend to be looked on differently within their families, even when they are equally loved. In most homes in most countries, parents raise their daughters to become wives and mothers, who are expected to raise families of their own. Human survival has depended on this important task.

Very early in life, girls usually find themselves taking second place to boys, who grow up with different expectations. In the extreme, these differences can be life-threatening — as, for example, when a girl in a poor family receives inadequate food or medical care compared to her brother. More common, of course, is the sight of girls doing strenuous household chores, such as fetching water or gathering fuelwood, while the boys are trained for work outside the household. One reason that this happens is that a girl is considered a temporary member of her family, one who will leave when she marries. And marriage is often considered the only career open to her.

The stories that follow are all drawn from the work of the United Nations and its family of organizations and illustrate some of the problems faced by girls in different parts of the world. First you will meet 14-year-old Nalini from India, who hopes that it may be possible to postpone her marriage, arranged by her parents with a man more than twice her age, whom she hardly knows.

In the next story, Wanjiku from Kenya, an eight-year-old, has been taken out of school by her parents so that she can help her mother with a new baby.

Half a world away, in California, 16-year-old Jenny, unmarried and pregnant, struggles with the question of whether or not to give her baby up for adoption. Further south, in Colombia, 11-year-old Maria, whose parents have sent her from their village to work as a maid in a household in Santa Fé de Bogotá, runs away from the employer who has all but enslaved her and finds herself alone in the streets of the big city.

The last two girls whom you will encounter in these pages, 11-year-old Zlata Filipovic of Bosnia and Herzogovina and 14-year-old Miranda Worthen of the USA, are real people who are very anxious about two plagues of our times: civil war and violence in homes and streets. Just as both of them have contributed to the world-wide debate on these issues, as you will see in these pages, I believe that you also can do so.

I hope you will reflect on the basic theme of each story in this booklet, which is also a central concern of the United Nations: human rights. Each story begins and ends with questions that refer to human rights, the status of girls and women and their contributions to development and peace, and what the United Nations can and cannot do to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom", as the Organization's founders pledged in its Charter.

Put yourself in the place of the girls you meet here to try to resolve their problems. Think about the relationships between girls and boys you know —or women and men — and write down your observations. Perhaps you can draw or possibly even photograph them — or compose a song or play about them. Think of the books you've read or the films and television programmes you've seen that focus on relationships between women and men. What do they tell you?

In his Foreword, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali refers to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. You may want to examine this important international agreement from the point of view of girls and their special needs. You may also want to look into the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. That body drew up the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as well as the recent UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The Commission has also contributed to the development of many international laws on modern forms of slavery, such as certain kinds of child labour that are increasing today, especially among girls. María is a case in point.

Most of the stories in this booklet also focus in one way or another on education. Therefore, you may want to do some research on the World Conference on Education for All, which was held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and was jointly sponsored by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank. Two of the highest priorities of this global meeting were closing the literacy gap between women and men by the year 2000 and making sure that all children, girls as well as boys, finish at least primary school. The map at the centrefold of this booklet compares school attendance of girls and boys in every major region of the world.

You may already have read about the International Conference on Population and Development and its efforts to improve the lives of families everywhere, and the World Summit on Social Development, mentioned by the Secretary-General, which drew world leaders together to

work out new strategies for attacking poverty, finding ways to live together in peace and creating jobs on an equal basis for women and men. Despite all our diversity the world over, these needs are universal, as are those on the agenda of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Poverty, unemployment, disease and illiteracy all stand in the way of global peace and security. And they simply cannot be overcome without equal partnership between women and men.

This partnership starts in the family and the early relationships between girls and boys at home and in school. It starts with you. The United Nations hopes that this booklet will help you play a part in this enormous task. Tomorrow's children, girls and boys alike, will thank you for it.

If you need our help, please do not hesitate to ask. We can be reached through our Public Inquiries Unit, Department of Public Information, Room GA-057, United Nations, New York 10017. Or you can contact the UN Information Centre or Service nearest you or indeed any United Nations Office in your country.

Please send us your ideas also, including your suggestions about future booklets for students. Children and young people are one of our most important concerns and constituencies. In addition, all of you will, as adults, help determine the kind of role the United Nations will play in helping make our world a better place.

Samir Sanbar

Assistant Secretary-General

Department of Public Information

Should Nalini get married at the age of 14?

Nalini set out the curry, rice and chapatis for her father and her older brother, Gautam, in the cramped family dress shop. Then she went to the back to brew their sweet tea and wipe the gritty dust from her feet. The monsoon rains couldn't come too early in north-west India; all the vegetable gardens of her village were parched, shriveled as she had never seen them before. Rajiv, her future husband, whom she had met along the road with one of his sisters, said he was worried about his crops. He had frowned all the way through their brief meeting; it made him look ugly. Not that he was ever handsome like her brother Gautam ... She was trying to like Rajiv, but it was hard. Even though he and his sister had been in his new truck, he hadn't offered to take her to her father's shop despite the awful heat. Also, Rajiv was 29, more than twice

Nalini's age, and when he talked to her — which, of course, he could never do before their marriage unless members of his family or hers were present — he spoke as if she were a child. But she did have to admit that his eyes were very fine, even beautiful — and that they lit up when he saw her.

She joined her father and Gautam. A new shipment of saris had arrived: the silks, cottons and synthetic fabrics lay on the counter helter-skelter. "I bumped into Rajiv and his sister on the way," she told them.

"A good man," said Gautam. "He will take good care of you. He will treat you like a princess — like the princess you are."

Her father nodded in agreement, pushing aside his plate.

Nalini loved Gautam even more than she loved their father. She loved the encouragement he gave her, even though he sometimes behaved as if she were still a baby. Her mother had told her that all older brothers were like that — even long after their younger sisters had become mothers five times over. But Nalini felt that despite the huge difference in their ages, Rajiv should treat her as her father treated her mother — with respect. She might never be as wise as her mother, but if Rajiv felt that her thoughts were worth hearing — as her parents and Gautam often did — she might come up with some ideas that he might like. "Oh, Gautam," she sighed, "if only Rajiv were more like you and Pappa..."

"Nalini, you know Pappa doesn't like that attitude. You can't really know Rajiv yet," said her brother. "When you enter his home

as his bride three months from now —"

"He'll shut me up in that house, he and his mother!" she heard herself saying, to her own surprise. Normally, she would never say such a thing to either of her parents — certainly not her father. A hush fell over the shop. She took advantage of the astonished silence her statement had caused. "They'll shut me up and never let me out. They'll make me start having babies the day after the wedding. And if those babies aren't boys, his mother will make my life a misery. A total misery ..."

"Nonsense," said Gautam. "She's a lovely lady. She still gives me sweets from time to time — when I bring her orders to her house."

"You're not a girl," replied Nalini. "She hardly ever even smiles at me — or even her own daughters."

"Come now," said their father, smiling slightly. "Just because neither Rajiv nor his mother is a chatterbox like the two of you ..."

Nalini felt that it was now or never to ask the question that had come to haunt her during the last few months. "Pappa, do I have to get married now?"

She dropped her eyes before her father's hard stare. Rajiv was the richest farmer in their village. His asking for her hand in marriage was an honour for her family and herself. And her father and Gautam and their older brothers who were

living in Bombay with families of their own — they were all working hard to save for her dowry, the money as well as clothes and sheets and other household goods that every girl in India brings to her bridegroom when she marries. "Pappa, if my marriage were postponed, you wouldn't all have to work so hard to pay my dowry. You would have much more time ..."

Her father reached out and stroked her hand as he shook his head.

"If Rajiv really wants me," Nalini went on recklessly, "he'll wait." Going to the counter, she began sorting the new saris by their colours and patterns. Then she hung a few next to others already displayed on the wall hooks so that they looked like a rainbow. Finally, she reached into the packages of bangles, selected a few carefully and pinned them to the gossamer fabrics that set them off best. No one stopped her. When she turned around, she found Gautam's eyes wide with wonder. Their father also seemed impressed; with a display like this, many of his customers would at the very least be tempted to buy more than they had planned. She probably could also show the women what would suit them best — sometimes the cheaper, but sometimes the more expensive cloth. She had her mother's gift for

knowing what brought out a woman's best features.

"You see, Pappa," she said, "you really need me much more than Rajiv does. And I can do accounts just as well as Gautam — because he taught me."

"Oh?" asked their father.

"Yes," confessed Gautam. "I though Nalini would be a better wife if she could help with the household accounts."

"Well," said their father, after a long silence, "I'll talk with Rajiv. Maybe he'll agree to postponing the marriage a bit, but I'm not making any promises, Nalini." Even a year or two, he thought. Fourteen **was** young; her own mother had been sixteen at their wedding. If someone other than Rajiv had asked for Nalini's hand, he probably would have said that the child was too young for marriage, especially in these new modern times when some girls, city girls, even **chose** their husbands. And now that Nalini had shown these skills — she might increase the volume of the shop's business a good deal. That in itself would reduce the burden of the dowry — that, plus the additional time...

Gautam's thoughts were somewhat different. In four years, Nalini would be eighteen, like himself. A true woman who could be a true companion to her husband. And if Rajiv didn't want her then, she would probably have met smarter — even richer — men from Bombay who would want a woman like her to help them in their business. That might be dowry enough. And perhaps she would really like one of them...

For further discussion:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines the end of childhood as the age of 18. How would you feel about getting married at the age of 14 or 16 or even 17 or 18? In many countries, UNICEF is trying to persuade Governments to make 18 the minimum age of marriage for girls.

- Is there a minimum age for boys in your country — or any other that you know of? How would you find out?
- Does the custom of dowry still exist in your country? What form does it take? Whose family pays for a wedding? What is bride price? Do you think it is a better or worse custom than dowry?
- Are your parents matchmakers? Do they do anything to see that you meet the kind of person they'd want you to marry?
- Why does Nalini fear that her life will be miserable if she has daughters rather than sons? Which would you want (if you care at all) as your first child — a girl or a boy? Why?

Why has Wanjiku dropped out of school?

As Nyambura lowered her pail into the sun-dappled stream from which she fetched her family's water each morning, she heard a pure, high voice singing the old song about the maize flowers blooming all over Kenya. It was Wanjiku; the voice was unmistakable — and much missed in class now that her parents had pulled her out of school to help her mother at home after the birth of her latest brother. Nyambura didn't quite understand why they had done that; her own mother had just as much work as Wanjiku's. And it made her uncomfortable that she was still in school when Wanjiku wasn't. She set her pail down and ran up the path to greet her

former classmate; she didn't want Wanjiku to feel that they weren't close friends just because they no longer saw each other daily.

"We got a new goat to go with my new brother," said Wanjiku as Nyambura took her hand.

"Which one is more trouble?" asked Nyambura, smiling.

"It's hard to tell. The goat, I guess. Yesterday it ate the sleeve of my red blouse."

They laughed together and, at the stream's edge, kicked off their sandals to cool their feet in the water.

"It's my little sister who's exciting," said Wanjiku. "She's beginning to talk. She still stumbles when she walks, but she chatters away. Just like me at her age, Mamma says."

Nyambura wondered if Wanjiku's baby sister would ever go to school. She tried to remember the proverb her mother had learned at the dressmaking centre where she had also learned to read a few years before. All the eight-year-old girl could recall, though, was that when she had asked if she should stay at home like Wanjiku, to help with the younger children and the other household chores, her mother

had pulled her ears gently and said, "Not you, honeypot. With that head of yours, you're going to write the kind of books that taught me how to read."

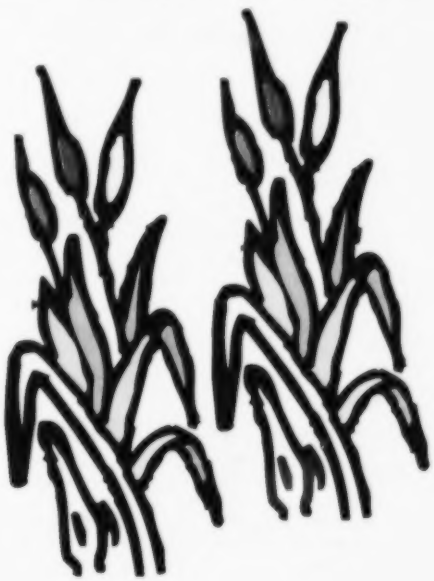
"And your father thinks the same," his voice had boomed suddenly in the doorway, "so don't go asking him such foolish things." He had entered the house, smiling, and threatened to tickle her to death if she raised the question again. That had closed the matter — for her at least... The problem, thought Nyambura, as she looked at her friend's rippled reflection in the water, was that Wanjiku's head was just as good as hers — different, but every bit as good. One of the reasons that she missed Wanjiku so much in class was that her friend's answers to their teacher's questions often set off new thoughts in her own head. Had each made the other's head better?

And now Wanjiku was asking just the question Nyambura had been dreading: "What's going on at school?"

"We're learning division," she replied. "It's easy," she added, remembering how good Wanjiku had been at math. "I could teach it to you if you like." Suddenly she realized that she'd said something wrong.

"Of course it's easy," Wanjiku retorted. "Just the opposite of the times tables we were doing when I left. If five times two is ten, then two goes into ten five times." She stood up and filled her pail. "You know," she said, "I bet I can get my older brother to teach me everything he's learned in school. I don't really need to go myself."

Nyambura wondered, but said nothing. That brother wasn't very interested in school — and he never seemed to have time for anyone but his friends. Then her mother's proverb came back to her: "Educate a boy and you educate one person; educate a girl and you educate a nation."



For further discussion:

Around the world there are about 100 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 who are not in school; more than 60 per cent are girls. Two thirds of the world's 948 million adults who cannot read and write are women. The United Nations wants all young people to go to school at least until they complete their high-school education. For those women who have been unable to learn to read and write during their childhoods, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) have set up adult literacy projects, like the centre which Nyambura's mother attended. In addition, UNESCO and UNICEF are working to promote images of dynamic, resourceful girls, some of whom also excel at math and science and other activities usually associated with boys in textbooks and the media.

• Do you know anyone who has dropped out of school? Do you know why? What are they now doing?

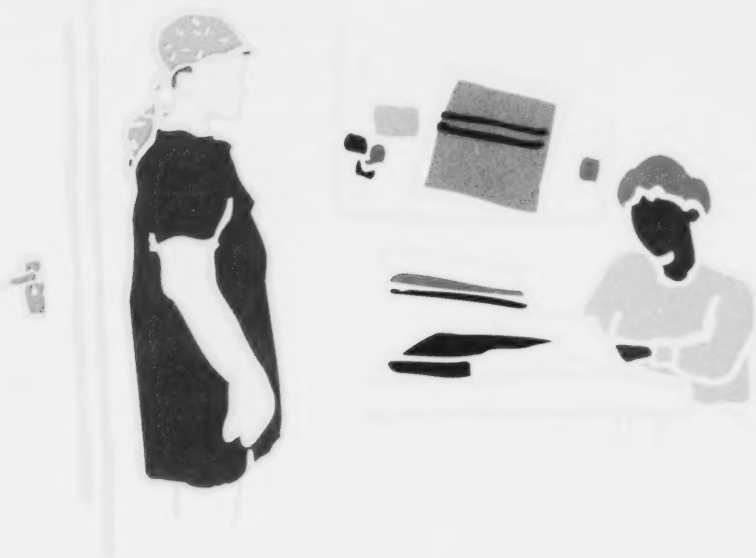
• Do girls and boys in your school respect and help one another? Have you noticed any differences in the way your teachers treat girls and boys? Or your parents?

• Would you want your daughter to become a welder? Or a physicist?

What will Jenny do with her baby?

"So you don't even want to think about giving up this baby for adoption, Jenny?"

Jenny fought back her tears. It was bad enough that the smog in Los Angeles was so thick that you could hardly breathe, but this question brought tears to her eyes. Why was it wrong to want to



have or keep your own baby just because you were young and unmarried?! She had agreed to see Lucy at the teen counseling centre only to please her aunt. So what if Lucy had given her own kid up and had gone back to school? They were different people. Very different people. And so what if she was only sixteen? Her mother had been even younger when she'd had her first kid.

"I ran into Mrs. Eliot the other day. She said that you were her best student in biology," said Lucy.

Jenny knew that ploy for what it was. Butter her up, then get her to say yes to just exactly what she didn't want to do. It wasn't that she disliked Lucy — even if the counselor was a prude. Only seventeen and already a prude. "You wouldn't understand," she said at last.

"Try me."

"This baby is the most gorgeous thing I'll ever make. You should see its father. And this kid will love me. It will really love me." The way no one ever had, she thought, except maybe her aunt and grandmother. Jenny's mother had left her with them when she was only three, and had died in an accident soon afterwards. But her aunt had four other kids. And counting herself, her grandmother had five all in the same house...That was why she needed someone all her own.

"Have you seen a doctor?" Lucy asked.

"Sure. At the beginning."

"But not since?"

Jenny shook her head. "Gran's better than any doctor."

"Probably," said Lucy. "But you could help by getting yourself checked out each month. For the baby's sake as much as yours — so that this kid will be healthy as well as gorgeous."

Ah, yes, Jenny remembered. Pregnancy could make both you and your kid anaemic. That was lack of iron. Or was it iodine? No, iodine was for the baby's nervous system and its brain. She could almost hear Mrs. Eliot stressing that point when they'd been doing human biology. "I've cut down on junk food," she replied, her voice betraying her pride at being so organized. "I also got some mineral supplements to take. And I'll be going back to the clinic after final exams next month... And when I realized I was pregnant, I got myself checked for AIDS. I'm okay for that, too. And I also got lots of stuff about safe sex."

There was a poster over the counselor's desk depicting a rooster in sneakers and sloppy socks. Above his head was a question: "What do you call a guy who flies the coop when a baby shows up?" Jenny laughed. That was what had happened to Lucy. Her own boyfriend, Bob, was sometimes a jerk, but he would stick around for his own kid.

"Does Bob know about the baby?" Lucy was asking.

Actually, he didn't. The baby wasn't showing yet — and Jenny had decided to put off telling him until after his exams the following month.

"Jenny, do you know how much a baby costs each month — especially in a town like this?"

"I make good money at the nail shop. Especially with the tips." She put on her sexiest drawl and flashed the smile that everyone talked about. "All the customers ask for me — and they know I don't do no one unless they tip me good... And Bob's boss says he's a great mechanic, the best he's ever had. So after his exams, when he can work full time and go to night school like he says —"

"Jenny," Lucy interrupted softly, "a baby costs hundreds of dollars a month." She could stay with the baby at her aunt's, but just the cost of diapers... Would Bob spend his money on a baby?

And would he be a good father — playing with the baby, singing to it, changing its diapers, taking it out in the stroller...?

Who knew? Jenny dropped her gaze to the worn linoleum on the floor. Bob liked cool clothes. And cool cars. And who knew how he'd behave with a baby? She'd never really thought about that sort of thing. Suddenly it occurred to her that **she** might have to leave school to work full time. But she was smart. She could always go back. She could also go to night school. She could work at The Nail during the day and finish school at night. And her grandmother, and aunt and cousins could take care of the baby and play with it... Only then ... whose baby would it be?

For further discussion:

Thirty per cent of the 500,000 women who die in childbirth every year are teenage girls; a major cause is anaemia due to iron deficiency, which pregnancy can cause. UNICEF is fighting to eliminate this pernicious disease, as well as to eliminate iodine deficiency problems. The babies of teenage mothers are often underweight and twice as likely to die as the children born to women in their twenties or above.

In part because a child's health depends to a great extent on the amount of education its mother has received, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) are urging Governments to try many ways to keep pregnant girls in school. Can you think of other reasons why pregnant girls should continue their education?

- Do you know any teenage parents? What has happened to their baby? What would you do if you were pregnant — or if your girlfriend were?
- How have you learned about sex, family planning methods and protection against AIDS?

Where can María find the family she needs?

María looked anxiously up and down the bright, perfumed street of Santa Fé de Bogotá's flower market. The chauffeur of the family she had just fled probably wouldn't think of trying to find her here; she had come to the market with the Señora and the driver only once, to choose orchids for the twelfth birthday party of the Señora's daughter. Although they were almost the same age, the Señorita rarely spoke to María — except to give her an order — during the whole year and a half she had worked in her home.

María's parents had sent her to the city from their small village because the Señora's laundress, one of their cousins, had said that the Señora wanted a bright girl as a maid. If María worked hard, she promised, the Señora would send her to a school that would train her for a better job later on. Her parents had believed it — and so had María. But even though the

Señora had seemed pleased — sometimes — with María's cleaning and helping the cook, the 11-year-old girl had never been permitted outside the house and its small garden except to go shopping with the cook or the Señora. She had slept in a closet before waking up at dawn to work every day, even Sundays, for 12 to 15 hours. Worse, she had never gone to school, although the cook had occasionally helped her to read the magazines that the family no longer wanted.

María had found the courage to run away from the Señora because here, in the flower market, she had seen Teresa, a friend from her village. Teresa had left two years before to escape the beatings her father gave her when he was drunk. Here her face and arms were no longer bruised — and she looked happy. She had been with a group of kids she called her family, with whom she was somehow earning her living in the market. María had learned nothing more because the Señora had pulled her away. She knew that many kids lived in the streets and sold their bodies for a few pesos just to eat. Teresa, though, didn't seem like one of those.

But there was no sign of Teresa or her "family" among the flowers today. Hunger had begun to gnaw María's stomach. She had

eaten nothing since the night before and, as the sun began to descend, the flower vendors were beginning to close their stalls. Two girls who were collecting discarded flowers had been looking at her intently on and off during the last few minutes. The taller one had even seemed to smile. She wondered if she might just go up to them and ask where she could find some food and a place to sleep. She hesitated; they might be just as poor as she herself. They probably were. Why else would they be picking up wilted flowers? Anyhow, they'd turned away.

"You seem tired, Señorita," came a voice behind her.

She turned to face a handsome man dressed like the young Señor — but with a ring on every finger and a gold-and-diamond clip holding his orange tie in place. She had avoided the young Señor. Only the week before, he'd tried to kiss her and she had ducked out of his grasp, though the effort had sent her careening down the stairs. He had laughed at her sprawled on the landing and had whacked her across the bottom the next day — hard.

"I'll bet you're hungry, too," the flashy young man was going on. "And that you'll look as pretty as you really are once you've had a good meal and a good night's sleep. And maybe a new dress as well. Why don't you let me take you to dinner?"

Despite these honeyed words, something was telling her, this man was like the young Señor — probably worse. But she was beginning to feel dizzy and knew she needed food. She'd had the strength, after all, to throw off the young Señor ... With food and some sleep, she would again be strong...

"Come," he was saying. "I'll take you to a place where you can make friends with some girls who are friends of mine and meet a lady who'll take care of you."

She was about to agree when the tall girl who had earlier smiled at her came up to them and almost barked at him, "Juancho, buzz off."

He retreated slightly; he even looked afraid.

"You're Teresa's friend, aren't you?" the tall girl asked María, "The one from the Colonel's house?"

Afraid herself, María nodded.

"And you've gotten out of their clutches?"

Even more fearful, the eleven-year-old murmured, "Yes." She was sure now that she'd be returned to the Señora — and then who knew what would happen?

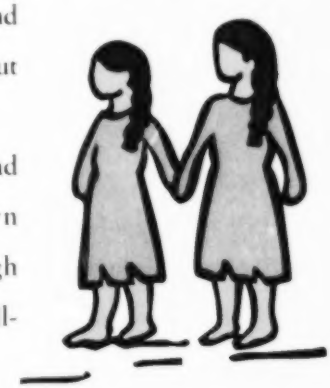
"That took guts," said the tall girl. "But — " she looked after the pimp, who'd turned his back — "This guy is no better. He's trash."

María felt tears rising to her eyes.

The girl held out her hand. "I'm Clara — and I can take you to Teresa. I'm not sure what we can do for you, but she might have an idea."

María took the outstretched hand and let the tears come.

Clara laughed, beginning to lead her through the market. "I'd better tell you that Teresa and me and the others — we're into trash, too. But a different kind. Garbage."



María winced. The cook had told her about kids — grown women, too — picking through garbage in the city dumps who'd fallen sick, who'd died ...

"Don't worry," said Clara, "we're not dump rats. It's a business. We recycle what people throw away."

María was puzzled.

"We sort out the stuff in the garbage," Clara explained, "and save the things that can be used again — or made into something else. And we get paid to do it." As they left the closing market, she told María how the recycling business worked — and how the kids in their group also went to school for three hours a day.

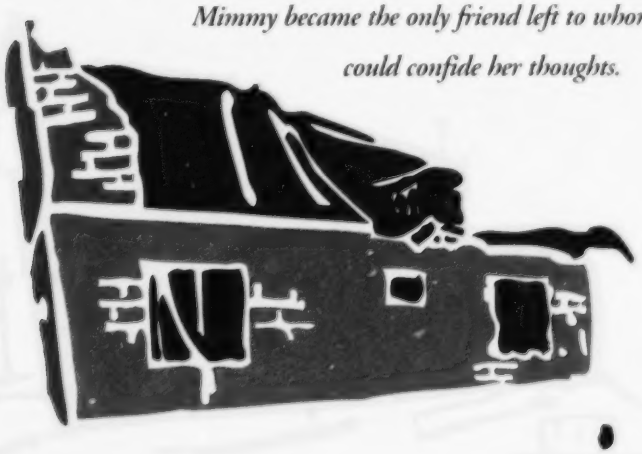
For further discussion:

Maria was very lucky as well as plucky. The United Nations estimates that more than 80 million children live in the streets of the cities around the world. More than a million are forced to earn their living as sex workers. Many other hundreds of millions remain hidden labourers, sometimes working for their parents or in middle-class households, unprotected by law because they are unseen. UNICEF tries to help those it can and, in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and community organizations, trains them to earn a living with dignity and potential for better jobs.

- Do you work? Why? What do you do? How do you use the money you earn?
- Do you know any homeless children? Can you try to describe how they live?
- Why are some children homeless? Who do you think should take care of them?

What does war mean for children and their families?

In her comfortable home in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11-year-old Zlata Filipovic never dreamed that war could ever touch her and the people she loved. Two months before bombs began falling on the city of Dubrovnik, not very far away, in September 1991, she began writing down the events of her life in a diary, to which she gave the name of a person, "Mimmy", someone to whom she could send letters. As the war moved to Zlata's own doorstep, many of her friends and their families began to flee to other countries. Mimmy became the only friend left to whom she could confide her thoughts.



On December 23, 1993, Zlata and her parents managed to escape to Paris on a UN plane. She has become one of almost 30 million refugees from many, many countries. Zlata no longer writes down her thoughts every day, but here are a few pages from "Mimmy" in Sarajevo:

Sunday, April 5, 1992

Dear Mimmy,

I am trying to concentrate so I can do my homework (reading), but I simply can't. Something is going on in town. You can hear gunfire from the hills. Columns of people are spreading out from Dobrinja. They're trying to stop something, but they say they themselves don't know what. You can simply feel that something is coming, something very bad. On TV I see people in front of the Bosnia-Herzegovina parliament building. The radio keeps playing the same song: "Sarajevo, My Love". That's all very nice, but my stomach is still in knots and I can't concentrate on my homework anymore.

Mimmy, I'm afraid of WAR!!!

Zlata.

Friday, July 3, 1992

Dear Mimmy,

Mommy goes to work at her new office. She goes if there's no shooting, but we never know when the shelling will start. It's dangerous to walk around town. It's especially dangerous to cross our bridge, because snipers shoot at you. You have to run across. Every time she goes out, Daddy and I go to the window to watch her run. Mommy says: "I didn't know the Miljacka (our river) was so wide. You run, and you run, and you run, and there's no end to the bridge." That's fear, Mimmy, fear that you'll be hit by something.

Daddy doesn't go to work. The two of us stay at home, waiting for Mommy. When the sirens go off, we worry about how and when and if she'll get home. Oh, the relief when she walks in!

Neda came for lunch today. Afterward we played cards. Neda said something about going to Zagreb. It made Mommy sad because they've been friends since childhood. They grew up together, spent their whole lives together. I was sad too because I love her and I know she loves me.

Zlata

Thursday, November 19, 1992

Dear Mimmy,

Nothing new on the political front. They are adopting some resolutions, the "kids" [Zlata's name for the Serb, Croat and Muslim leaders] are negotiating, and we are dying, freezing, starving, crying, parting with our friends, leaving our loved ones.

I keep wanting to explain these stupid politics to myself, because it seems to me that politics caused this war, making it our everyday reality. War has crossed out the day and replaced it with horror, and now horrors are unfolding instead of days. It looks to me as though these politics mean Serbs, Croats and Muslims. But they are all people. They are all the same. They all look like people, there's no difference. They all have arms, legs and heads, they walk and talk, but now there's "something" that wants to make them different.

Among my girlfriends, among our friends, in our family, there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims. It's a mixed group and I never knew who was a Serb, a Croat or a Muslim. Now politics has started meddling around. It has put an "S" on Serbs, an "M" on Muslims and a "C" on Croats, it wants to separate them. And to do so, it has

chosen the worst, blackest pencil of all — the pencil of war which spells only misery and death.

Why is politics making us unhappy, separating us, when we ourselves know who is good and who isn't? We mix with the good, not with the bad. I simply don't understand it. Of course, I'm "young", and politics are conducted by "grown-ups". But I think we "young" would do it better. We certainly wouldn't have chosen war.

The "kids" really are playing, which is why us kids are not playing, we are living in fear, we are suffering, we are not enjoying the sun and flowers, we are not enjoying our childhood. WE ARE CRYING.

A bit of philosophizing on my part, but I was alone and felt I could write this to you, Mimmy. You understand me. Fortunately, I've got you to talk to.

And now,

Love,

Zlata.

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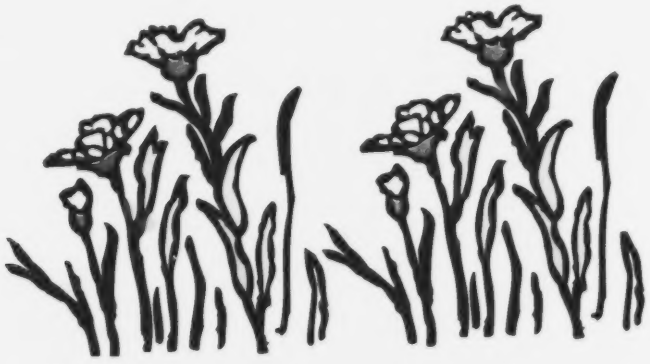
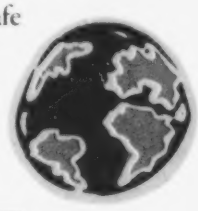
For further discussion:

- Do you know any refugees? What do they say about war? What does war do to families? Does it affect men and women differently?
- Do you know of any case in which "politics" has prevented war? The United Nations has kept full-scale war from breaking out in Cyprus since 1964 by diplomacy — one form of politics — bringing the Greek and Turkish Cypriots to agree in 1974 to cease-fire lines and a buffer zone that UN peacekeeping troops have since patrolled.
- Why can't the United Nations stop any and all wars?



Why is Miranda afraid?

In November 1993, Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, received the following letter from a teenage girl who lives in a comfortable suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, and whose mother works with battered women who have found refuge in a centre where they can feel safe as they seek to gain control of their lives:



Dear Madam Chair:

My name is Miranda Worthen. I am 14 years old. My mother and I were talking the other night and realized that neither of us has ever felt safe in the world as women. We were wondering whether there is a place anywhere in the world where women are safe from violence both in their own homes and in public? We realized we couldn't imagine living in the world without fear. If you know of any place, we would appreciate your getting back to us...

I would like to go to this place because I would like to have the experience myself and also so I could understand and do here what they do there.

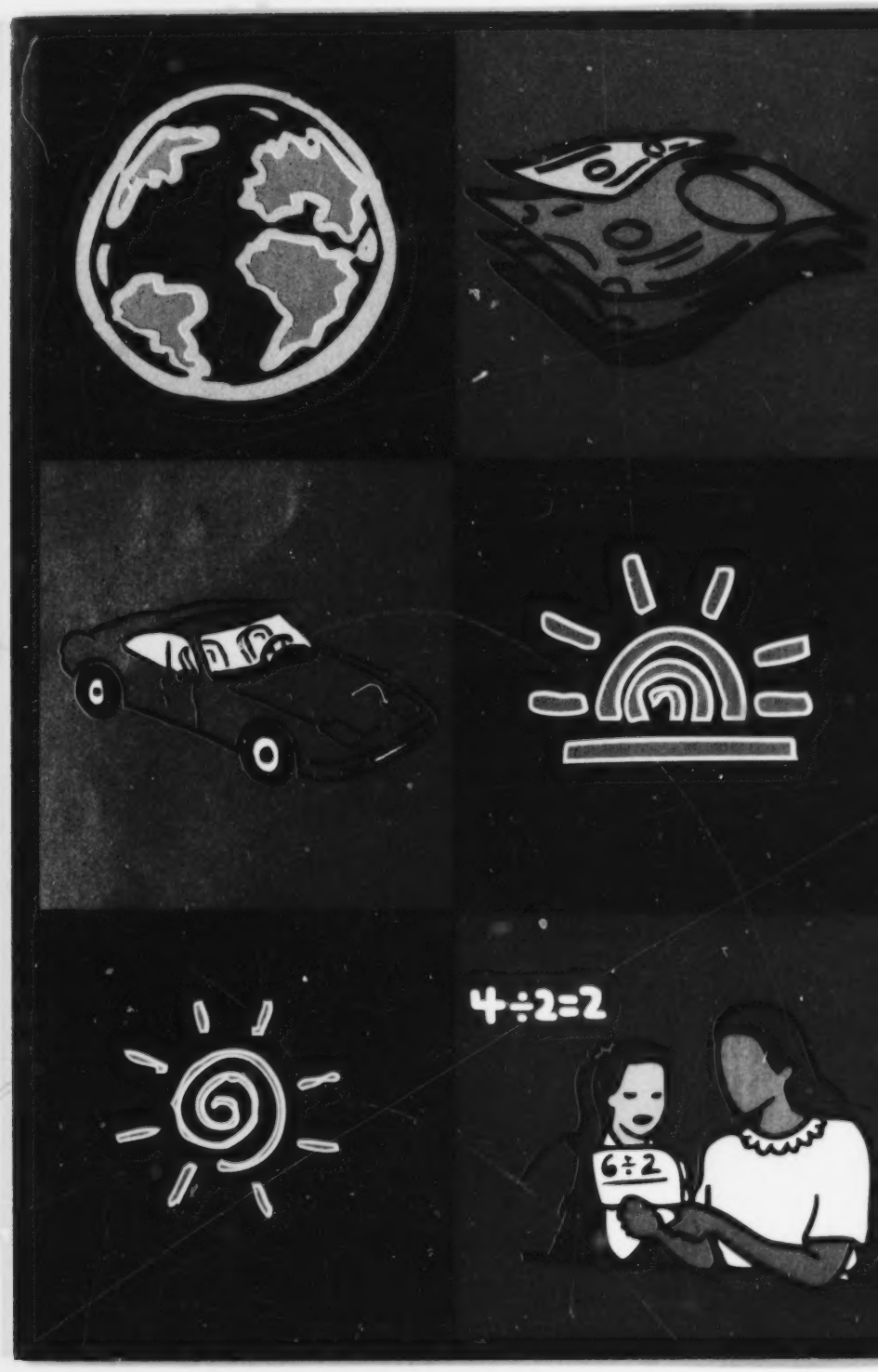
Sincerely,

Miranda Eve Worthen

For further discussion:

Do you know such a place? Mrs. Mongella doesn't. Because the United Nations is eager to learn from young people how they envision the world of the twenty-first century, Mrs. Mongella invited Miranda to participate in the first of a series of regional youth consultations in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Although Miranda was the youngest person in that group, she contributed thoughtfully to its discussions.

- Can you describe the kind of place in which women — and all other citizens, regardless of gender or age — would be safe? What laws and customs would it have? What kinds of families would live there? What would they do with their days and nights?
- What kinds of sports and games would they play? What kinds of subjects would they study?
- What kinds of plays and songs and paintings and films and radio and television programmes would they have? Would you and your classmates try such a project? If so, would you please tell the United Nations about what you have created?
- Do you feel safe where you live? Do you feel safe at your school?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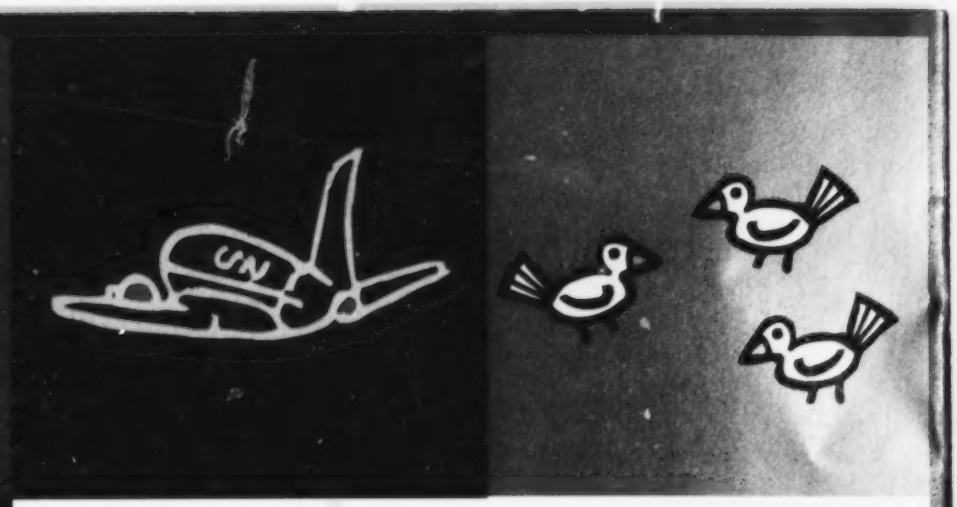

We are counting on this generation of girls and boys to advance the cause of equality between women and men around the world. Only a real partnership between women and men, which begins in the home, will ensure true progress for us all.

Gertrude Mongella
Secretary-General
Fourth World Conference on Women